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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify factors that help to explain the dynamics responsible for the participation and nonparticipation of minority-group parents in school activities. This was done to provide guidelines that, specifically, might improve the chances of an elementary school principal increasing the number of minority-group parents who make in-school contacts and that, generally, would have implications for other sectors of American life concerned with the participatory behavior of these parents. This purpose was accomplished by evaluating an experimental self-help parent education program conducted in twenty-seven public elementary schools in New York City (the case study aspect of the investigation) and, integral to this evaluation, making a status study of the school-parent programs and the Parent-Teacher Association programs in these schools and in two other similar schools. The time period covered by the study was the 1965-66 school year. [This document has been reproduced from the best available copy.] (Author/SB)

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THE PARTICIPATION OF MINORITY-GROUP PARENTS IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES: A STUDY AND A CASE STUDY WITH GUIDELINES

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by

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April 1972

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Summary of a study done under the auspices of the Center for Urban Education, a Regional Educational Laboratory under Title IV of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Center operates under the Bureau of Research, United States Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

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Introduction

In the quest for quality education for minority-group children that has existed for roughly the past fifteen years, parent participation has occupied an important and, more recently in the name of community control, even dramatic focus. The reason can be found in the belief that there is a positive relationship between the quality of a child's home life and his school success and, similarly, in the belief that there is a positive relationship between the participation of parents in the conduct of the school program and the quality of that program. Each belief, in turn, has been guided by the conception that the school has a right and responsibility to help improve the quality of community life, while at the same time the community has a right and responsibility to participate in the operation of the school.

These beliefs and conceptions have found expression in a variety of programs, practices, and events. The success of these programs, practices, and events has depended on their ability to secure the participation of parents. For this reason, it is evident from the literature that most have failed, since few, if any, have been able to secure their participation on any significant, sustained scale. Indeed, one of the most perplexing problems that schoolmen and others have faced over the last fifteen years is that of how to secure the participation of parents in activities and processes provided for or opened up to them.

This situation should not be surprising, as neither the problem nor the effort is new. Although a story seldom told, this same problem existed during another period in the history of the American public school and similar efforts were made to solve it--and with similar outcomes. The period in question is that from roughly 1890 to 1924 when, through the Americanization movement, the school attempted to secure the participation of immigrant parents in a variety of activities, especially night schools. They met with minimal success, attracting--it is estimated--no more than 5 to 10 percent of the population.

This historical parallel aside, what is surprising is that despite the perceived centrality of the problem in the quest for quality education for minority-group children, hardly any research has been done with respect to it. The little research which has been done is concerned mainly with the relationship between socioeconomic status and parent participation. In those instances where other considerations have been addressed, such as the relationship of program characteristics to parent participation, the quality of the studies leaves much to be

desired.[1] A common and critical missing element is quantitative assessment. The examinations of programs and practices do not report "hard data" on the proportion of parents participating. The study on which the summary below is based represented an attempt to help fill the void described here.

Whereas the focus of the study was on school-parent ties, the relevance of the findings extends far beyond the participatory relationship between these two agents. Broadly conceived, this report is a study in parent and citizen participation. The urban public elementary school happens to be the agency concerned. It could well have been, say, Model Cities, a community school board, a political election, or an adult education program. The specifics, of course, would have differed, but on the basis of research studies, there is reason to believe that many of the underlying dynamics would have been the same.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify factors that help to explain the dynamics responsible for the participation and nonparticipation of minority-group parents in school activities. This was done to provide guidelines that, specifically, might improve the chances of an elementary school principal increasing the number of minority-group parents who make in-school contacts and that, generally, would have implications for other sectors of American life concerned with the participatory behavior of these parents.

Design of the Study

This purpose was accomplished by evaluating an experimental self-help parent education program conducted in twenty-seven public elementary schools in New York City (the case study aspect of the investigation) and, integral to this evaluation, making a status study

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[1] See my review of the literature: Joe L. Rempson, "An Exploratory Study to Help Increase the Number of Parents Who Make In-School Contacts in Low-Income Urban Area Public Elementary Schools," Doctor of Education Project Report, New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1969, pp. 17-54; also see my article: "School-Parent Programs in Depressed Urban Neighborhoods," Robert A. Dentler and others, eds., The Urban R's: Race Relations as the Problem in Urban Education, New York, Published for the Center for Urban Education by Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967, pp. 130-157.

of the school-parent programs and the Parent-Teacher Association programs in these schools and in two other similar schools. The Experimental Program was conducted by a parent organization, which is herein called the Experimental Agency. The major evaluation emphasis was on the Experimental Program, with progressively less emphasis being accorded to the school-parent programs and the PTA programs, respectively. The time period covered by the study was the 1965-66 school year.

The main sources of data were 415 Negro and Puerto Rican control parents, 376 Negro and Puerto Rican supplementary control parents, 209 Negro and Puerto Rican experimental parents, 150 Negro and Puerto Rican parent leaders, the 13 supervisors in the Experimental Program, 125 teachers, 25 principals, 15 Parent-Teacher Association and Parent Association presidents, school records, records kept by the Experimental Agency, and observations of discussion meetings, school-parent activities, and PTA and PA meetings. The data were gathered mainly through self-administered questionnaires that were sent the control parents and the supplementary control parents by pupils and that were mailed to most of the experimental parents and to all of the PTA and PA presidents; teachers were given theirs in person. Interviews were conducted with selected experimental parents and with all of the principals who, in addition to filling out questionnaires on their own in some cases, were also interviewed. Observation schedules were employed in observing the discussion meetings. The main test of significance employed was the chi-square test.

The Experimental Program

The main purpose of the Experimental Program was to help parents to gain the confidence and know-how that these parents need to be able themselves to help their children to raise the level of their school achievement specifically and their intellectual development generally. Its target group was hard-to-reach parents. The chief method whereby it sought to accomplish its goal was discussion meetings wherein parents were invited to: learn and discuss what the school was doing in the different curricular areas, learn how they could help at home, and discuss any concerns which they had. Supervisors from the Experimental Agency trained parents (called parent leaders) in the respective schools to run the program in their school. The supervisors were experienced in Parent-Teacher Association work and were themselves trained by the Experimental Agency.

In their conduct of the discussion meetings, the major problems encountered by the discussion leaders, whether the supervisors or the parent leaders, were:

1. Providing an enticing social climate.

2. Getting participation from the whole group.

3. Keeping to the subject.

4. Presenting the material in an interesting way.

5. Integrating and summarizing the discussion.

6. Asking thought-provoking questions.

7. Having command of the information discussed.

The Experimental Program had six major weaknesses:

1. It did not enlist the cooperation of the school and therefore did not have the active support of teachers and principals.

2. It spread its supervisory staff so thin that the staff was unable to concentrate its efforts, with the result that the program was poorly coordinated.

3. It gave too little attention to the problem of recruiting parents for the program. Poor attendance was a major source of dissatisfaction to many experimental parents, to parent leaders, and to some supervisors.

4. It gave grossly inadequate attention to those process variables which are related to effective group discussion.

5. In general, it failed to formulate a program design with behavioral objectives and tactical approaches, and to train a staff to implement it effectively.

6. It failed to practice open and rigorous self-criticism in its staff meetings, and it did not encourage divergent thinking.

The reaction of the participants to the Experimental Program was at variance with what the foregoing suggests. Most expressed satisfaction with it.

With respect to the effects of the Experimental Program, no hard data were gathered. Self reports by the participants (both experimental parents and parent leaders) indicated, however, that they benefited fromtheir involvement. The benefits which they expressed consisted primarily of three gains: an improvement in their ability to guide their children's growth, both in school and out of school; a strengthened self-image (for example, more confidence in their ability to speak in public, greater self-understanding, an increased feeling of

personal dignity, and a feeling of increased adequacy in their wife-mother role); and an increase in their knowledge of how the school functions and how they should function in relation to it.

School-Parent Activities

The administration of school-parent activities in the sample schools was almost always handled by the principal, an assistant principal, or a guidance counselor. The schools were virtually on their own in the conduct of whatever activities they sponsored. They got little help or encouragement from the central office, nor did they enlist the aid of outside agencies. Of the various possible types of printed materials that they might have distributed to parents, they rarely made use of any of them and of none of them on a systematic basis. The most commonly used printed materials which they employed were routine notices to parents, those notices--indicative of the other printed materials examined--generally being poorly written, being unimaginative, and having a reading level which the parent data indicate was probably too high for at least 19 percent of the parent population. Whereas a variety of school-parent activities took place in the sample schools, with two exceptions, none of these schools had a school-parent program in the sense of a systematic, unified attempt to establish contacts with parents.

Parent-Teacher Association Activities[1]

The general impression gained is that the relationship between the principals and the PTAs was one of forced cooperation. The principals expressed a desire to see an active PTA, but they did little to help make it so. The PTA leadership, on the other hand, often saw the principal as someone who wanted to know its business and who wanted to dominate its meetings. In its minds, he was further someone responsible for the low academic standing of the schools. It wished, therefore, to keep him "in his place" and "on his toes."

While the principals did little to help make the Parent-Teacher Associations effective, the central body that assumed the responsibility to help make them so was understaffed. Five part-time field representatives serviced 430 schools, an average of 86 schools each.

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[1]This includes Parent Associations, too. (Teachers are barred from membership in these Associations, which is what differentiates them from Parent-Teacher Associations.)

Like the sample schools, none of the PTAs had a unified, thought-out parent program. Of the activities which they sponsored for parents, few of them were parent education activities. Five published an occasional newsletter, but these newsletters were of a poor quality and contained little parent education information or information about the school and its curriculum.

Data from the 376 supplementary control parents revealed that the parents who least often participated in Parent-Teacher Association activities did not feel welcome when they attended PTA meetings. Nor did they get what they expected from these meetings. The expectations most frequently mentioned were a desire to learn what goes on in school, a desire to learn what could be done to improve what goes on in school, an attempt to gain a better understanding of how parents and teachers can work together, and a wish to learn about their child's behavior or progress.

The Drawing and Holding Power of the Discussion Meetings and the Status of School-Parent Contacts

Drawing Power of the Discussion Meetings

Combining the parents who attended the discussion meetings (the experimental parents) with the parents who acted as discussion leaders (the parent leaders), the 137 discussion meetings which were held drew a total of 765 parents. This amounted to 6 percent of the total parent population of the 20 sample schools. For the two groups combined, the discussion meetings for a given school drew a typical median of 5 percent of the parent population, and a given meeting a typical median of 2 percent of the parent population.

Of the experimental parents who had a chance to attend the discussion meetings more than once after their first visit, 29 percent of them did. In turn, 29 percent of this group attended two or more consecutive meetings--most of these attending only two consecutive meetings.

Individual School Contacts by Parents

The fall and spring teacher-parent conferences in 23 sample schools were attended by a median average of 34 percent of the parent population. Of 464 control parents (mothers and fathers), 60 percent of them reported making one or more self-initiated visits to see teachers. On an overall basis, of 383 control parents, 18 percent of them had not made individual visits of any kind to see a teacher; the plurality of the others reported having made from three to five such visits. For the supplementary control parents, 62 percent had made

one or more self-initiated visits to see teachers, the plurality having made from three to five visits in their case also.

Group School Contacts by Parents

The group meetings (grade conferences and parent workshops) which were held for the entire parent population in six of the sample schools had a median average drawing power of 4 percent of the parent population.

Parent Contacts by
Teachers and Principals

On a per teacher basis, the average number of parent contacts initiated by 117 teachers on a class-wide basis was 20, these contacts being initiated mainly as agents of the principal. The average number of individual parent contacts which they initiated was 25, slightly under one contact per parent given their average class size of 28. The participation of teachers in the civic, political, and social life of their school communities was minimal.

The typical principal among the 25 interviewed had one in-school activity for parents. Except for the fact that four of 19 of the principals belonged to police precinct groups in the neighborhoods where they were principals, none of these principals belonged to civic, political, or social organizations which held meetings in these neighborhoods. Nor did they otherwise participate in the life of their school neighborhoods or communities.

Parent-Teacher Association Participation

The reports of the principals indicated that the typical drawing power of the Parent-Teacher Association meetings was an average of 5 percent of the parent population, about the same as the drawing power of school-sponsored group meetings. The data on 314 control parents revealed that 19 percent of them were PTA members, and that 51 percent of these 19 percent had attended one or more PTA meetings. Only 12 percent of 330 control parents had at one time or another helped with such school activities as taking pupils on trips.

Hypotheses

Seven main hypotheses and twelve popular hypotheses were tested. Each is listed, with an indication in parentheses of whether it was

supported or rejected.[1] The list is followed by topical narrative summaries that provide a more unified overview of the findings yielded by all nineteen hypotheses.

The seven main hypotheses were:

1. The drawing power of the discussion meetings and that of the other group meetings for parents at a given sample school will not significantly differ from one another. (S in general)

2. The drawing power of the school-parent activities and the status of the teacher-parent contacts can be explained partly as a function of selected sociological characteristics of the parents. (S) The working hypothesis was that proportionately more high-contact parents than few-contact parents will have:

   2. 1. A lower age level (SN-SNP)

   2. 2. More children who are at a lower grade level (SN-SP-SNP)

   2. 3. More children who are from the upper ability level of their classes (SNP)

   2. 4. Fewer preschool children (SNP)

   2. 5. Fewer children (SN)

   2. 6. Strong father role (SN-SNP)

   2. 7. A lower residential mobility rate (SN-SNP-SP in opposite direction)

   2. 8. A longer period of city residence (SN-SNP)

   2. 9. A higher educational level (SN-SNP)

   2.10. A higher occupational level (SP-SNP)

   2.11. A higher employment rate (SNP)

   2.12. Fewer among them who have day-time jobs (SN-SNP)

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[1]Symbols: S = Supported; R = Rejected; SN = Supported for Negro parents; SP = Supported for Puerto Rican parents; SNP = Supported for Negro parents and Puerto Rican parents combined.

2.13. Less preoccupation with economic concerns (S in opposite direction for N and NP)

2.14. More civic interest (SN-SNP)

2.15. A higher rating on the importance attached to education (SP-SNP-SP in opposite direction for young women)

2.16. A greater feeling of responsibility for their children's academic achievement (SN-SNP)

2.17. Higher educational aspirations for themselves and their children (SNP for their children)

2.18. More self-confidence in the presence of school personnel (SP in presence of teachers--same for NP--in opposite direction for N in presence of counselors)

2.19. A lower degree of satisfaction from their previous contacts with the school (R)

2.20. A positive image of their ability to change school and neighborhood conditions (SN-SNP)

2.21. A positive attitude toward the school (R)

2.22. A higher rate of membership and participation in group activities (SN-SNP)

2.23. English-speaking ability among foreign-born parents (S)

3. Parent participation in the discussion meetings and the school-parent activities can be explained partly as a function of the sex of parents and of the ethnic composition of the parent population. (S) The working hypotheses were that:

3. 1. Proportionately more mothers than fathers will participate in the discussion meetings and the school-parent activities. (SN-SNP)

3. 2. Where the opportunity exists for two or more ethnic groups to participate together in the discussion meetings or the usual group meetings for parents at the sample schools, one ethnic group will disproportionately outnumber the other ethnic group. (S)

4. Contrary to the expressed intent of the Experimental Agency, the discussion meetings will fail to make a significant breakthrough in reaching few-content parents; rather, the parents who attend the discussion meetings will be more similar in selected sociological characteristics to high-contact than to few-contact parents. (S) The working hypothesis was that, like high-contact parents, these parents will differ from few-contact parents in that proportionately more of them will have:

   4.1. A lower age level (S in opposite direction for N and NP)

   4.2. Fewer preschool children (R)

   4.3. A lower residential mobility rate (SN-SNP)

   4.4. A longer length of town and city residence (R)

   4.5. A higher educational level (R)

   4.6. A higher occupational status (SN-SNP)

   4.7. A higher employment rate (R)

   4.8. More among the foreign-born who speak English (R)

5. The number and the type of teacher-initiated and principal-initiated parent contacts in the sample schools are a function of selected sociological and professional characteristics which these teachers and principals have. (R re number--S re type for teachers) The working hypothesis was that more parent contacts and more type of parent contacts of a high quality are initiated by the teachers and principals who, proportionately:

   5.1. Have a lower social-class background (R)

   5.2. Participate in neighborhood-based organizations (R)

   5.3. Have a more favorable perception of parents and higher expectations of them. (R)

   5.4. Have a more favorable perception of pupils (R)

   5.5. Perceive the school as a powerful change agent (R)

   5.6. Have a higher morale (R)

   5.7. Have a college major or minor in social science (R)

5. 8. Have more experience in low-income area schools or have worked longer in their present school (R)

5. 9. Are older (R)

5.10. Are married (R)

It was further hypothesized that two characteristics--importance attached to parent cooperation and amount of education--have no relationship to the number and quality of the type of parent contacts initiated by these teachers and principals. (S) The quality of the type of contact was determined by the extent to which the type of contact was personal. The more personal the type of contact the higher its quality as a type of contact, on the ground that it would make possible better communication.

6. The more parent contacts that the teachers and principals initiate, the more school contacts the parents initiate, these contacts being similar in type to the type of contacts initiated by the teachers and principals. (S for teachers--R for principals)

7. Some characteristics of the activities investigated will be associated with higher drawing or holding power than other similar characteristics of these activities. For example, discussion meetings held at night will be associated with higher drawing power than discussion meetings held during the day. (S)

The twelve popular hypotheses were:

1. Parents do not come out because they are not interested in their children. (R on indirect evidence)

2. Parents do not realize the importance of showing an interest in their children's schooling. (SNP)

3. You see only the parents of the children who are doing well. (SN-SNP)

4. Many parents do not get notices sent home from school. (SN-SNP)

5. Often parents are not made to feel welcome when they visit the school. (SN-SP-SNP)

6. Parents do not find their visits to the school useful. (SNP)

7. Teachers use words that make it hard for parents to understand. (R)

8. Parents are afraid that they will not be able to put what they want to say into the right words. (R)

9. Parents do not have what they consider the proper clothes. (R)

10. Parents often do not belong to the Parent-Teacher Association because they cannot afford to pay the membership dues. (S for high-contact N and NP)

11. Parents stay away from night meetings because of fear of being attacked. (SP)

12. Parents have had unpleasant school experiences. (SP-SNP)

Discussion Meetings Versus Other Group Meetings

In general, the drawing power of the discussion meetings and other group meetings in the sample schools did not significantly differ. The Experimental Program thus failed to reach more parents than normally reached by the school. Significant differences were found to exist among the schools in the drawing power of their activities for parents, the same holding true for the discussion meetings. Some of the reasons for this are suggested by the findings below.

Parent Characteristics

The parents who most often participated in school activities differed significantly from the parents who least often did so. It is true whether reference is being made to Negro parents, Puerto Rican parents, or both--but particularly if reference is being made to Negro parents and to Negro and Puerto Rican parents combined.

In their objective characteristics, in comparison with few-contact Negro parents, more high-contact Negro parents to a significant extent had lived in the city a greater percentage of their lives; had moved fewer times in recent years; had, together with their spouses, lived in their present house longer; were younger; had fewer children; had more children in the primary grades; had children who were doing well in school; had a higher educational level; more often worked at night or alternated between day and night work; along with their spouses, belonged to more social clubs; were from homes having a strong father role; and were more likely to get notices sent home from school.

In their subjective characteristics, to a greater degree than with respect to their objective characteristics, in comparison with the few-contact parents, more were more concerned, in particular, about the job situation in their neighborhood and, in general, about neighborhood conditions (that is, had greater civic interest); felt more certain about their power to help improve these conditions; felt a greater sense of responsibility for their children's academic achievement; and felt welcome when they visited the school.

The distinctions were not nearly so many in the case of Puerto Rican parents, as there were only six whose meaning is clear. In comparison with few-contact Puerto Rican parents, more high-contact Puerto Rican parents had spouses who had a higher occupational status, said that membership dues prevented their becoming a Parent-Teacher Association member; more often spoke English; attached more importance to education for young men; found their own schooling unpleasant; and stayed away from night meetings at school for fear of attack. In general, however, the trend of the difference was identical to that for Negro parents.

In comparison with their few-contact counterparts, more Negro and Puerto Rican high-contact parents had lived in the city a greater percentage of their lives; had moved fewer times over the past three yeqrs; had, together with their spouses, lived longer in their present house; were younger; had a higher educational level; more often worked at night or alternated between day and night work; more often had spouses who were employed and who had a higher occupational status; along with their spouses, belonged to more social clubs; were from homes having a strong father role; said that membership dues prevented them from becoming a parent-Teacher Association member; got school notices; and had children who were doing well in school.

In their subjective characteristics, the high-contact Negro and Puerto Rican parents combined, in comparison with their few-contact counterparts, were more concerned, in particular, about the job situation in the neighborhood (that is, had more civic interest); felt more certain about their power to help improve neighborhood conditions; had greater self-confidence in the presence of teachers; got what they expected from their visits to teachers; had higher educational aspirations for their children; attached greater importance to education for young men; felt a greater sense of responsibility for their children's academic achievement; realized the importance of showing an interest in their child's schooling; and had found their own school experiences unpleasant.

Other data suggest or confirm that in comparison with their few-contact opposites, Negro and Puerto Rican parents (separately and combined) more likely had more children in the primary grades, had more children in the upper-ability groups of their grades, and had fewer preschool children.

Finally, the study revealed that parents who made contacts on their own initiative, though few-contact parents as defined in this study, shared some of the characteristics of high-contact parents, such as a relatively high educational level, residential stability, self-confidence in the presence of school personnel, and a positive perception of their ability to change the school. This was particularly true for Negro and Puerto Rican parents combined, but less so for each of them separately, although with few exceptions the trend for both was in this direction.

The Sex Factor

Whether parents participated at all in school activities was, except for Puerto Rican parents, partly a function of their sex. For Negro parents and for Negro and Puerto Rican parents combined, significantly more mothers than fathers participated in these activities. For the regularly scheduled activities--Open School Week and the fall teacher-parent conferences--the Puerto Rican fathers, however, did not significantly differ in their attendance from the Puerto Rican mothers. Only in regard to extraparental activities--the discussion meetings and self-initiated visits to see teachers--did the Puerto Rican mothers significantly outnumber the Puerto Rican fathers.

The Ethnic Factor

In addition to being partly a function of their sex, whether parents participate at all in school activities was also partly a function of the ethnic composition of the parent population. Of the three samples that provided an adequate test (the discussion meetings in two schools and one Parent-Teacher Association meeting), in all of them one of the two ethnic groups in the population (Negro or Puerto Rican) had a significantly greater proportionate representation than the other ethnic group.

Other findings relative to ethnic group participation showed that significantly more Puerto Rican fathers than Negro fathers participated in regularly scheduled school activities, whereas parallel evidence for their respective spouses was inconclusive. Insofar as the overall relationship between ethnic status and participation is concerned, data on parent attendance at the fall and spring teacher-parent conferences in 23 of the 27 sample schools revealed that as the percentage of Negro parents in the population increased, so did parent participation in these conferences (.38 correlation), while as the percentage of Puerto Rican parents in the population increased, parent participation in these conferences decreased (-.40 correlation). The data further revealed that the Puerto Rican parents in the sample participated less than the Negro parents in organizational activities, as represented by their past membership in the Parent-Teacher Association and by the fact

that significantly fewer of them participated in the discussion meetings.

These participation differences between Negro and Puerto Rican parents are attributed at least partly to the differences between the two groups in language and to the fact that to a significantly greater extent than the Negro parents, the Puerto Rican parents possessed many of the key objective and subjective characteristics--such as a low educational level, a high mobility rate, and less attachment to the importance of education--which this study shows are significantly related to low parent participation in school activities.

Effectiveness of the Discussion Meetings in Reaching the Hard-to-Reach Parents

Those parents who attended discussion meetings had or tended to have key selected characteristics similar to the parents who were shown to make relatively frequent in-school contacts, the same being applicable to those parents who returned to the discussion meetings most often. The Experimental Program therefore failed in its attempt to reach the hard-to-reach parents. The parents that it did reach were the middle parents. These were the parents who in their characteristics fell between the hard-to-reach parents, as exemplified by the few-contact parents, and the most active parents, as represented by the parent leaders. The data revealed that these leaders possessed characteristics which typify the characteristics associated in the literature with the most active parents in a school. They were the oldest, the most residentially stable, and the most educated of the parents.

Teacher and Principal Characteristics

The number of teacher-initiated parent contacts was not directly a function of the teachers' sociological and professional characteristics, and in only one instance were they indirectly a function of these characteristics--that instance pertains to social-class background. Rather, they are interpreted to have been a function of the discipline problems which teachers were experiencing. Teachers were high-initiating because they were seeking to solve the classroom discipline problems which they were having with their lower-ability classes. On the other hand, those who most often sought to solve their problems by contacting parents were teachers with lower social-class backgrounds.

The data pointed to three variables as related to the number of parent contacts initiated by the principals, each variable operating statistically independent of the other in this regard: the years of experience which they had as heads of low-income areas schools (.61 correlation); their perception of their pupils (.47 correlation); and an active Parent-Teacher Association as determined by the percent

attendance at PTA meetings (.42 correlation). The latter finding may partly reflect the role that incentive and pressure provided by the PTA played in principal-initiated contacts with parents which, if so, would be in accord with qualitative observations.

The type of parent contacts initiated by the teachers was not found to be associated with any of the ten characteristics predicted, but was discovered to be associated with three characteristics that had not been predicted. The primary grade teachers expressed a greater willingness to visit parents' homes during school hours than intermediate grade teachers. In comparison with the teachers who were few-initiating in contacting parents by telephone, significantly more of the teachers who were high-initiating in this regard had taken courses which they reported had helped them in their contacts with parents. And in comparison with the white teachers, significantly more of the Negro teachers had contacted parents by telephone. From these three findings, it may be inferred that more type of parent contacts of a high quality are likely to be initiated by teachers who, singularly or in combination, ethnically identify with the parents, understand the parents' life situation and life style, or are committed--by training--to teacher-parent cooperation. Limited data did not permit an adequate test of a comparable relationship for the principals.

An analysis of the related qualitative findings led to the conclusion that the fact that teachers saw the school as having limited power to change community life;did not, by implication, see the school as being responsible for the status of its relations with parents; had little formal training to assist them; and got little help or encouragement from the school all combined to help explain the status of teacher-initiated parent contacts. Heading the list of things mentioned by teachers as facilitating their contacts with parents were, in order, administrative encouragement, the scheduling of specific activities for parents, having a telephone available to call parents, and, in Puerto Rican communities, having a Spanish liaison teacher.

The related qualitative data for principals pointed to the status of the number of parent contacts which they initiated as being a function of their perception of parent cooperation as only marginally related to the main problems which faced them, to their implicit belief that the school was not responsible for the status of school-parent relations at their schools, to their almost total lack of formal training,[1] to the little help and little incentive which they received from central office, and to the demands placed on them by the varied nature of their job.

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[1]"Formal training" refers to the courses in school-community relations.

Reciprocity in School-Parent Contacts

For teachers, there was a relationship between the number and type of parent contacts which they initiated and the number and type of school contacts which the parents made. The high-initiating teachers received from parents more contacts than the few-initiating teachers. Relative to the type of parent contacts which they initiated:

1. Teachers who were high-initiating in sending home notes or letters through the mail received from parents significantly more notes or letters through the mail than the teachers who were few-initiating in their use of this method of contact, significantly more than those who were high-initiating in sending home notes or letters by pupils, and more than those who were high-initiating in telephoning parents.

2. Teachers who were high-initiating in sending home notes or letters by pupils received from parents more notes or letters by pupils than did the teachers who were few-initiating in their use of this method of contact, and more than those who were high-initiating in their use of the other two methods of content.

3. Teachers who were high-initiating in telephoning parents received from parents more telephone calls than did the teachers who were few-initiating in their use of this method of contact, and more than the teachers who were high-initiating in their use of the other two methods of contact.

For principals, the data did not permit an adequate test of the existence of a relationship between the type of contacts which they initiated and the type of school contacts made by parents. The other part of the hypothesis for them was not adequately tested either.

In related findings, a relationship was further discovered between the number of school contacts made by parents and the ethnic composition and stability of the teaching staff. The higher the percentage of the teaching staff that was Negro in predominantly Negro schools the higher was the average percentage of the parents who attended the fall and spring teacher-parent conferences (.69 correlation), and for the sample schools generally, the higher the percentage of the teaching staff that had three years or more of teaching experience the higher the average percentage of parents who attended these conferences (.56 correlation).

Two other related discoveries imply that the number of parent contacts which teachers initiated were significantly related, not only to the quantity of school contacts that parents make, but also to the quality of these contacts. The teachers who were most frequently

contacted by parents for the purpose of getting homework for their children and for the purpose of learning how to help their children with their schoolwork were high-initiating teachers.

Program Characteristics

Four of seven characteristics examined were found to have a significant relationship to the added drawing or holding power of parent activities:

1. Notifying parents of any school activity in a face-to-face contact.

2. Activities held near the beginning of the school year.

3. A topic with one or more of four characteristics:

   3.1. It provides an opportunity for parents to learn about the behavior and progress of their children.

   3.2. It provides an opportunity for parents to observe their children in a school activity.

   3.3. It concerns a subject area that parents feel or know presents a problem for their children, or that is important for their children's success in school.

   3.4. It provides help for parents in regard to something which the parents want for their children.

4. The quality of a discussion activity, as measured mainly by its informativeness, that quality including for non-English speaking parents making what transpires intelligible in their language.

The time of day an activity is held, the day of the week it is held, and the use of indigeneous leadership in conducting an activity showed no significant relationship to its drawing power.

Consistent with the quantitative findings, the qualitative data gathered from parents either explicitly or implicitly reveal that parents liked activities whose foci are directly or indirectly on their children, or on the role and related performance of the school regarding their children. They, too, expressed a like for activities that have a friendly, informal atmosphere and which provide them an opportunity to share with a sizeable number of other parents their interests, concerns, and problems.

Familiarity Generalizations

Given the purpose of this study, the emergence of four familiarity generalizations may be its most important contribution. Based on nine findings, "familiarity" is here defined as the state of directly or indirectly knowing or being acquainted with teachers or parents as a specific or generalized group, or on an individual basis. These findings suggest the following four generalizations regarding familiarity:

1. The more familiar parents are with teachers, the more likely they are to initiate contacts with them.

2. The attendance of parents at group school activities is frequently influenced by their acquaintance with one or more of the participating parents.

3. The more familiar teachers are with parents, the more personal their method of contact with them is likely to be and the more likely they are to initiate parent contacts if they feel that there is a need to do so.

4. There is a reciprocal relationship between the frequency with which teachers initiate contacts with parents and the frequency with which parents initiate contacts with teachers.

Guidelines

Based on the findings presented, 24 guidelines are recommended as to how the elementary school principal in a low-income area might improve his chances of increasing the number of parents who make in-school contacts. The empirical evidence presented suggests that for activities involving individual school contacts by parents, they would draw at least from 40 to 60 percent of the parent population, and that for activities involving group school contacts by parents, they would draw at least from 12 to 21 percent of the parent population. In each instance, this would be higher than the drawing power of similar activities in three-fourths of the schools that made up the sample.

These guidelines are intended as much to stimulate thinking as they are to guide action. The findings do not point to any one guideline or any particular combination of guidelines that are likely to lead to an increase in the number of parents who make in-school contacts. Its import is that it is the right combination of guidelines, conscientiously pursued, that will accomplish this goal, a right combination that can only be determined upon experimentation and evaluation.

Indeed, much cause for pessimism can be found in the findings. They unmistakably suggest that, given the structural barriers that stand between school and parents, such as the low socioeconomic status of the parents, the principal may well have to settle for a low contact level. In that case, his most important contribution to improving the academic achievement level of the minority-group child (his ultimate goal) lies in making fundamental improvements in the school. This undertaking could be greatly assisted, of course, through increased parent participation, even though that participation might involve a small percentage of parents.

Following is a summary of the 24 guidelines. Space does not permit giving the rationale for each or stating the suggestions which accompany them.

1. On his own or through formal instruction, the principal should expose himself to some of the thinking and research in the area of school-community relationships.

2. An organizational structure should be established for the conduct of the school-parent program.

3. The principal should adopt those policies and practices which maximize staff stability.

4. A teaching staff should be recruited that, insofar as is consistent with sound educational practice, is proportionately representative of the various ethnic groups in the parent population. Effective use might also be made of paraprofessionals in this context.

5. In the absence of a definite career selection, minority-group parents should be encouraged to advise their high-school-age and college-age children to take up careers in elementary school teaching in low-income areas.

6. Parents should be involved in school activities in such a way that they get the feeling that they have power and influence in shaping the school program.

7. Just as the school has a planned curriculum for pupils, it should have a planned curriculum for parents.

8. The principal should make himself visible in the school neighborhood.

9. Teachers and principals should continually communicate with parents through a variety of printed materials.

10. The first two weeks of the school year should be set aside for home visits by teachers.

11. In addition to home visits, teachers should be continually encouraged to initiate parent contacts and should be provided the time and help they need for this purpose.

12. The Parent-Teacher Association should be helped and encouraged to be active.

13. Notices to parents about parent activities should be sent by the most personal method possible.

14. A systematic attempt should be made to see that parents get notices sent to them.

15. Insofar as possible, activities should be scheduled so as to coincide with periods when the natural interest of parents would be expected to be highest.

16. It should be made convenient for parents to participate in school activities.

17. Activities should be provided which, variously or in combination, focus on parents' children either directly or indirectly, on the role and related performance of the school regarding their children, and on the parents' own role and performance regarding their children.

18. Group discussion activities should be provided for parents.

19. Activities should be provided which are based on parent-centered needs and interests.

20. Activities should be provided for fathers only.

21. Given a bilingual parent population, translaters should be provided for non-English speaking parents in their contacts with the school.

22. Given a bilingual parent population, from time to time separate activities should be provided for the ethnic groups represented.

23. Given a bilingual parent population, the development of a bilingual parent leadership should be encouraged.

24. Insofar as possible, activities should be provided for parents which assist them in improving their social and economic status.